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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 TRIPOLI 000372

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

FOR: NEA/MAG, NEA/PPD, ECA D. IVES, K. WILSON

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SUBJECT: PD PROGRAMS FALL VICTIM TO BILATERAL TENSIONS

REF: TRIPOLI 289

¶1. (U) Summary: Since January, Post has experienced increasing difficulties in obtaining visas for incoming Public Affairs Section visitors, both for educational and cultural programs. The Government of Libya (GOL) has canceled some programs outright, and has simply not approved visas for others. These recent difficulties appear to be the result of an intentional decision by elements within the GOL, rather than the routine difficulties of navigating the Libyan bureaucracy. End summary.

#### RECENT HISTORY OF CANCELED PROGRAMS

¶2. (U) Prior to January, Post experienced several months of relatively successful Public Affairs Section (PAS) programming, particularly educational programs. We brought in our first English Language Fellow, conducted successful English Language Specialist workshops, and gained routine access for the first time to students and faculty at Libyan public universities. However, since January several programs have been canceled by the GOL. While the Embassy has successfully secured visas for other visitors during the same time period, PAS visitors have been singled out for denial. Failure to issue visas to PAS visitors is not a reciprocity issue, as Post has expedited and issued more visas more quickly in response to Libyan official requests than the GOL has done for Embassy official requests (see reftel).

¶3. (U) In early January, DAS Tom Farrell, accompanied by other ECA staff and 4 representatives of American universities and higher education, planned to come to Libya to meet with representatives of Libyan universities and government officials. Despite prior agreement to the visit and assurances that visas would be approved, the visas were not approved. The General People's Committee for Foreign Liaison and International Cooperation (GPCFLIC, or MFA-equivalent) blamed the snafu on their internal bureaucracy.

¶4. (U) In mid-January, the GOL canceled the planned performance of a musician following a U.S. court decision awarding compensation to families of victims of the UTA bombing. The GPCFLIC told the CDA that it was not the right time for such performances, stating that it would be "confusing" for the GOL to facilitate concerts by a U.S. musician in the wake of the court decision, and suggesting that the U.S. postpone it. Shortly thereafter, the musician's visa, which had previously been approved, was canceled.

¶5. (U) In early February, the GOL abruptly canceled an event that the GPC for Higher Education (GPCHE) had requested of the Embassy - an information session for recipients of Libyan scholarships for post-graduate study in the United States.

Expecting to brief several hundred students, CAO and visiting Regional Education Advising Coordinator were notified of the event's cancellation minutes before it was scheduled to begin. Despite Embassy efforts to provide information to scholarship recipients, PAS still frequently receives complaints about the Libyan students' lack of preparation for applying to and studying at U.S. universities.

¶16. (U) In mid-April, the GOL canceled the performance of a second musical group. PAS had taken precautionary steps to confirm that the musical performance would be permitted, and obtained approval from various government bodies. Our local partners had also obtained approval to host performances. In early April, our local partners contacted us to let us know they received instructions to cancel the scheduled performances, and were told that given the state of the bilateral relationship, such programs were not a priority for the Libyan government. In subsequent conversations, Libyan officials told the P/E Chief that public programming was not appropriate because the bilateral relationship was "not fully normalized".

¶17. (SBU) In April, Post expected an American Fulbright grantee to come to Libya to work with professors at Garyounis University. Despite written approval of the Program and numerous assurances, the visa has not been issued. The Head of the Protocol Office told a Post employee that he wished that Public Affairs programs would simply go away. (Comment: We believe that the Protocol Office has instructions not to issue visas to Embassy visitors who will engage the public, and that excuses blaming lack of visa issuance on bureaucratic snafus is merely a dodge. End comment.)

¶18. (U) In late April, Post expected the publishers of MEPI's My Arabic Library program to come to Libya to meet with the GPC for

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Basic Education to discuss implementation of the program, which Libyan authorities have approved. The visas were not approved, much to the disappointment of officials at the GPC for Basic Education, who, in addition to the My Arabic Library program, are eager to meet with American publishers to discuss using American textbooks in public schools.

¶19. (U) During the first week of May, Post planned to host Dr. Steve Morrison of SAIS. The Green Book Society, the National Center for Disease Control, and Al Fatah University Medical School had all agreed to host Dr. Morrison for events. His visa was not approved.

#### CONFLICTING MESSAGES

¶10. (U) It is clear that our Libyan education and cultural partners want Americans to come to Libya to implement joint programming. They are greatly disappointed when Americans do not receive their visas, and complain of conflicting points of view they hear behind the scenes. The GPC for Basic Education is tasked with finding the best textbooks possible, and has been advised by some government parties to use American textbooks. Without being able to host American publishers, however, they cannot find a way to practically implement that plan. Libyan universities are tasked by the highest levels to send their students to the U.S. for study. University administrators, however, are blocked from bringing American professors and representatives to Libya to establish the relationships necessary to achieve that objective.

¶11. (SBU) At a recent meeting at Al Fatah University Medical School, the dean complained about the inability of Libyan academic administrators to achieve the unrealistic and frequently contradictory goals of Libyan politicians. He described how "politicians" have told him that he has to send 2,000 students to the U.S., Canada, and Great Britain for medical school next year. When he explains that Libyan students will not be accepted into medical schools in those countries, he is viewed as a nay-sayer. When he introduces plans to improve the quality of Libya's medical education (such as bringing

American medical school representatives here to discuss curriculum development and establishing joint programs, meeting American accreditation standards, and sending Libyan students to U.S. schools for undergraduate degrees followed by medical school), "the politicians" criticize him for his suggestions that will take too long to implement. (Note: A key part of a proposed Regional Nuclear Medicine Center project being implemented with USG assistance involves sending Libyans to U.S. medical schools for advanced training. End note.)

¶12. (SBU) The new Educational Attachi to the Libyan Embassy in Washington recently expressed to us his nervousness that the goals he is tasked with achieving are unattainable. While Libyan officials have repeatedly stressed that they want Libyan students to return to U.S. universities by the thousands, the Libyan bureaucracy, and to a large extent, Libyans themselves, remain intransigent in terms of their willingness to meet the requirements necessary to matriculate in U.S. schools.

#### MORE DIFFICULTIES AHEAD

¶13. (U) While for the past two years American universities have given Libyan students substantial benefit of the doubt in accepting them, there are already rumblings from those universities about Libyan students. Universities have recently remarked about the high level of complaining from Libyan students and the intense bureaucratic support they and their families require. They also note that while some Libyan students have done exceptionally well academically, others are performing terribly. A number of GOL scholarship students reportedly have paid more than 1000 Libyan Dinars each to poorly-qualified local "educational agencies" for assistance in completing university admissions forms (typically Colorado State and Oklahoma State) and visa applications. The universities have found that many such admissions forms contain inaccurate information and essays they suspect the students themselves did not write. Universities are now reviewing applications from Libyans with more intense scrutiny to try to better screen them.

¶14. (U) In addition to more intense scrutiny by American universities, Libyan students hoping to study in the U.S. may also begin to experience more intense scrutiny during their visa interviews. Post's Consular Officer recently learned that at Oklahoma State University, 50% of Libyan students have applied for public benefits. It is not clear yet whether that indicates

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that GOL scholarship funds are insufficient, and/or that Libyan students budget such funds poorly. Another possibility is that Libyan students are seeking to inappropriately exploit public benefits, even if they have sufficient funds from other sources. (Note: Egyptian Embassy officials recently told P/E Chief that Libyan university students in Egypt, who number in the thousands, routinely abuse public benefits reserved for Egyptian students.)

¶15. (SBU) Comment: As the bilateral relationship has grown more tense during the past several months as a result of outstanding compensation issues and human rights issues, GOL officials who oppose reengagement with the U.S. have gained ground in putting a halt to PAS programs in Libya. While Libyan government officials still desire reengagement with the American academic community, their lack of understanding of the academic environment coupled with the recent trend of refusing American visitors prevents Libyan academic officials from achieving those goals. Post will continue to push in particular for educational programs and visitors. End comment.  
STEVENS